

martian child



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DISCUSSION GUIDE

Developed by Heartland Truly Moving Pictures to accompany *Martian Child*, recipient of the Truly Moving Picture Award, an honored distinction given to films that unlock the vast potential of the human spirit and enable us to view stories that display courage, integrity and hope, taking entertainment to a higher level.

TrulyMovingPictures.org

www.newline.com/properties/martianchild.html



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One Film Can

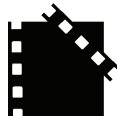
Heartland Truly Moving Pictures, a non-profit organization, recognizes and honors films and filmmakers whose work explores the human journey by expressing hope and respect for the positive values of life. We believe that one film can move us to laughter, to tears, or to make a difference. *Martian Child* is a movie that demonstrates that **One Film Can**.

The Creators

Based on the Hugo and Nebula Award-winning short story by science-fiction luminary David Gerrold (writer of the classic “Star Trek” episode, “The Trouble with Tribbles”), *Martian Child* is directed by Menno Meyjes, the Academy Award nominated screenwriter of the feature film *The Color Purple* and writer/director of the film *Max* (Lionsgate). David Kirschner, the creator of the animated feature film *An American Tail*, and Corey Sienege are the producers of *Martian Child* — their past credits include *Miss Potter* and *Secondhand Lions* (New Line Cinema) — with Ed Elbert (*Anna and the King*) sharing producing duties.

The Synopsis

In *Martian Child*, David Gordon (John Cusack), a recently widowed science fiction writer, considers adopting Dennis (Bobby Coleman), a young orphaned boy who claims to be from Mars. Ignoring some sage advice about the perils of parenthood from his sister Liz (Joan Cusack) and the qualms of children’s group home director Sophie (Sophie Okonedo), David decides he wants to be a father to the odd youngster who keeps insisting he is an alien. Even with the support of his friend, Harlee (Amanda Peet), who David finds himself increasingly attracted to, the aspiring dad soon finds himself in way over his head.



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I don't care about the details, you guys got the heart and soul of it. The important thing is the relationship.

Author David Gerrold, excerpted from "*Martian Child* Production Notes."
Courtesy of New Line Cinema.

Martian Child is based on the novel of the same name by David Gerrold. The book is based on a true story of a single, gay man's struggle to adopt a boy diagnosed with ADHD, while in the movie the main character is a recently widowed man (David) interested in adopting a peculiar boy. Each version of the story highlights Dennis' "Martian" peculiarities and his overall emotional struggles in various ways.

However, the differences between the book and movie do not detract from the center of the story, that of a relationship between a man and a love-starved boy — two people who want to love, and be loved, for exactly who they are.

Consider their parent/child bond as you dive into this movie guide and use this onscreen relationship to help you think about the relationships in your life.



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There's nothing you can do that would ever change the way I feel about you. Do you understand?

David (John Cusack), excerpted from *Martian Child*. Courtesy of New Line Cinema.

Throughout *Martian Child*, David encounters frustrations as he disciplines Dennis, as any parent would. However, he loves Dennis unconditionally.

- How is David's unconditional love displayed throughout *Martian Child*?
- How does Dennis respond to David's love and parenting?
- Does he readily accept that there is such a thing as unconditional love?
- What are some examples of Dennis' resistance to David's love?
- Why does he resist this love?

Unconditional love can be tricky. Sometimes it can make it hard to know when to be a friend and when to be a parent.

- In what instances does David let himself be swayed by Dennis' needs and demands?
- What are some examples of David standing firm with Dennis?

The people who raised each of us has had an enormous impact on who we are today. *Martian Child* demonstrates the power of parental influence in many ways. An example of this is highlighted during the scene in which Dennis meets with the panel of social workers.

- What things does Dennis say that confirm how heavily David has influenced him in the short period of time they have been living together?
- What signs does Dennis exhibit throughout the movie that demonstrate how his foster care experiences affected him?

Listen, the thing about kids - and I wouldn't trade mine for the world - is that they keep coming at you.

Liz (Joan Cusack), excerpted from *Martian Child*. Courtesy of New Line Cinema.

As David's sister, Liz gives plenty of advice about parenting. She loves her children and values her experience of being a parent, but often highlights the immense responsibility associated with the task when discussing the topic with David.

Consider David's character in the movie and his struggle to determine if adopting a child is right for him.

- What all does David have to consider as he approaches the idea of adopting a child?
- Although David's sister loves her children and cares about them deeply, what is her reason for trying to influence David against adopting a child?
- Do you feel that her argument is convincing?
- Do you feel that David considered the appropriate emotions before embarking on the journey of being a parent?

Think about your own parents or guardians and the sacrifices they potentially made to provide you with the life you have experienced.

- Upon making his decision to adopt Dennis, what sacrifices did David have to make?
- In what ways did adopting Dennis alter David's life?
- In what ways did it alter Dennis'?

In the book, David is drawn to Dennis when he sees a picture of him riding on a bike, before he knows of Dennis' emotional problems. In the movie Sophie, the social worker, realizes that Dennis would be a good match for David, but is very upfront about Dennis' peculiar habits.

- Why do you think that David gravitated to the child he did?

How much do you make them kind of conform to the world and how much do you let them be who they are?

Actor John Cusack, excerpted from “*Martian Child* Production Notes”
Courtesy of New Line Cinema.

Dennis has a difficult time fitting in with his peers. He is a remote child who further isolates himself from society through his peculiar behavior.

- Why does Dennis think he is from Mars? What are some coping methods that other children use?
- What do you believe is the significance of Dennis’ gravity belt?
- Why does Dennis steal from others and take pictures of the world around him?
- What does Dennis’ study of humanity conclude? What does the movie express about what it means to be human?
- In what ways does David let Dennis explore being a Martian and in what ways does David help Dennis conform to the world around him?

Children have the opportunity to be influenced easily by the world around them through media of all forms, social encounters with teachers, peers and other adults in their lives and, most heavily, by the people who raise them.

- What activities do you explore with your child or children you mentor?
- How do these activities help them explore who they are?
- Do these activities positively reinforce ideas you would like for them to grow up with? In what ways do these activities reinforce these ideas?

No kid should ever grow up without a mom or a dad.

Author David Gerrold, excerpted from “*Martian Child* Production Notes.”
Courtesy of New Line Cinema.



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David Gerrold, author of *Martian Child*, has used his personal story of adopting a child to create awareness for the growing need for foster families and adoptive parents. His full quote is as follows:

“The numbers are scary,” Gerrold states. “There’s a half million kids in the foster care system. And 100,000 of them – that’s a small town – 100,000 of them are never going to be adopted. That’s because there’s a critical shortage of qualified adoptive parents who are willing to take on the challenge of a special needs child. A kid who’s been abused, who is emotionally disturbed, who’s hyperactive; who might be HIV positive. But these kids need loving; the person inside them is hungry and desperate to be loved. So my big wish for the movie is that it’s going to get the kids out of the group homes and into families where there’s somebody who’s going to tuck them in at night and hug them and read them a story and tell them how much they love them. No kid should ever grow up without a mom or a dad.”

After watching *Martian Child*, think about the ways you might become involved in a child’s life on a number of different levels. There are several organizations dedicated to improving the quality of life for youth across the nation. Here are just a few:

MENTOR

www.mentoring.org

National Foster Care Coalition

www.nationalfostercare.org

Truly Moving Moments

Martian Child has been honored as a Heartland Truly Moving Picture Award-winning film. This award was created to honor films released theatrically that align with Heartland’s mission to recognize and honor filmmakers whose work explores the human journey by artistically expressing hope and respect for the positive values of life.

These award-winning movies are made up of moving and inspiring moments – those moments that cause you to think, see something in your life differently and be inspired to do something. It’s what makes the movie and its message remain with you well after you’ve left the theater.

Think about *Martian Child*. What were the moments that stood out to you? How did they make you feel? How will they cause you to think about things differently in the future? Share those Truly Moving moments with others at www.TrulyMovingPictures.org. Simply create a membership or login if you already have one and then search the movie list for *Martian Child*. You can leave your review of the movie or thoughts about your Truly Moving Picture in the “Thoughts and Reviews” section.



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